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of the
United States
House of Representatives

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NEVADA



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December 1, 1983

Mr. John N. McMahon
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C. 20505

Executive Branch
83-5818

Dear Mr. McMahon:

Please find enclosed the newspaper article by Dino Brugioni Congressman Harry Reid discussed with you.

If you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to call.

Since early,

Edie
EDIE BARKER

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Available technology could have stopped floods

By Dino A. Brugioni
L.A. Times/Washington Post
News Service

The massive flooding now plaguing the West largely could have been prevented by a federal government that had the technology, methodology; data and expertise to do so, but for a variety of bureaucratic reasons, chose not to.

The National Weather Service bombarded us with the news that the snowfall in the mountains was of record proportions and in some areas was two, three and four times the normal fall. While there was ample warning of an impending disaster, little or nothing was done in Washington to plan any action to deal with the tens of millions of dollars of damage now being done.

Gerald Williams, chief National Weather Service hydrologist at Salt Lake City, said last week that the government does not have enough snow and runoff gauges in the Rocky Mountains to quickly predict a sudden and serious snow melt.

Yet the tools and expertise were there.

The NASA satellite photos were clear, detailed and encompassed the areas of snow melt concerned. Additional data could have been provided by NASA or Air Force photographic overflights.

The U.S. Geological Survey had available maps of the areas of concern, of sufficient detail and the scale required for snow melt measurement and analysis.

The Defense Mapping Agency and the CIA have excellent photogrammetric capabilities which could have been used to measure and compute the amount of snow and the attendant run-off water that would come from such snow packs. The lay of the snow in the mountains and the streams to which the water would flow could also easily have been determined. With the flow computed, areas of flooding could have been predicted.

Within the federal establishment, there already exists the computer capacity to process and analyze the data required for this task. Local, state and federal agen-

cies had detailed knowledge of the geology of the affected area; the areas of erosion and silting were well known from previous rains and snow melts. Chronic problems that exist on Slide Mountain between Carson City and Reno were also well known.

Why then was not this talent, expertise and equipment organized and applied? Why was there no master plan of action? Why was there little or no warning of disaster to those concerned? From my experience of over 40 years within the federal establishment, experts from the cited organizations would have been willing, even eager, to give their talents to spare the suffering and damage done to our Western states.

The fault lies with management in the federal executive and with the Congress that did not encourage, order or legislate such cooperation. Each organization went its separate and uncoordinated way. The National Weather Service relied mainly on ground observations rather than using space-age techniques developed by the intelligence agencies,

NASA and the Department of Defense. As a result of this lack of coordination and cooperation, cities and towns had little or no warning of impending disaster, although the areas and the magnitude of the damage could have been accurately predicted.

It seems strange that in matters involving the national security outside our borders — such as landing the Marines in Lebanon, or removing troops from the Sinai in implementing the Camp David accords — task forces are organized with experts from the various agencies detached from their regular duties and assigned to aid in the planning and execution of a particular mission.

Yet, when it comes to domestic matters involving the nation's economic security, little or nothing is done. I am convinced that had a task force of experts been organized to report directly to the president and the Congress, the material damage to the Western states and the loss of life could have been substantially controlled and reduced.

There were many options:

The U.S. Army Engineers had experts in the construction of levees, the channelization of water, and flood and mud control problems. Earth-moving equipment could have been pre-positioned in the flood-prone areas. Sand could also have been positioned for digging. The data on water flow in the streams and rivers was comprehensive.

The Tennessee Valley Authority has developed an elaborate tele-conferencing system for drawing down dams and reservoirs to contain heavy run-offs from rains and snows. Their model could easily have been adapted.

The U.S. Army has tons of aging explosives that it is willing to use on worthwhile projects. On advice from expert photo interpreters, geologists, and hydrologists, channels could have been blasted or mud holding or trapping areas created.

There are many local, state and academic organizations possessing additional knowledge and equipment that could have been brought

to bear on the problem. At the very least, state road crews, private construction contractors and the National Guard should have been fully mobilized as if for a catastrophic blizzard.

The total amount of money and effort expended on the creation of a task force would have been minimal compared to the cost to the federal government in loans and aid to disaster victims. And this does not take into account the pain and suffering that the victims would have been spared.

We have learned much from this year's experience. But meteorologists have warned that we might experience record snowfalls for the next three years. It's not too early, therefore, to start planning for the creation of a national task force provided with the best of data and equipment, and staffed by the finest state, federal and academic experts.

Dino A. Brugioni is a retired senior official and reconnaissance and photo interpretation expert for the Central Intelligence Agency.

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